



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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them, the children gain, besides the immediate joy in the life represented, and the right training of the emotions by their right exercise thus administered (which I maintain is the true function of poetry), they gain, I say, besides this, exercise to their own powers of imagination; the wings of their own fancy become fledged, and they can fly at will. And, secondly, they gain skill in the use of language. Coleridge defined poetry in a homely way as "the best words in the best order"; and it is, of course, a primary mark of poetical style that the words are not like modern coins or counters struck in a mint, whose value is ascertainable at a glance, but like antique coins or medals, which have, indeed, a rough and common value, but have also an individual delicacy and distinction, in which lies their artistic value.

Now, these two things—a faculty of realising vividly, and a power of vivid expression—are of the essence of culture, and the best antidote to the vulgarity which is in all the air we breathe.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS.*

BY HENRY PERRIN.

WHEN your Secretary very kindly invited a representative of the P.N.E.U. to give you some account of the objects and work of the Society, I very gladly embraced the opportunity, because I felt that, however imperfectly I might lay the case before you, a body of trained teachers like yourselves could not fail to perceive the importance of its aims, or the value of the work that we have set ourselves to do; and further, because, from the discussion which it is the object of this paper to elicit, I expect to gather many suggestions of special value from your experience in one part at least of the Education of Children. That a Society like ours can do more than touch the fringe of this great subject, even if we had the number of members and the means at our disposal that we are sometimes ambitious enough to dream of, we should be the first to admit; whether we are setting about our work in the right way, you must judge. If at present we only succeed in arousing here and there *one* parent to a higher sense of his responsibilities, we think we shall not have worked in vain.

This, then, is the fundamental idea on which all our principles rest, that parents are, and must grasp the fact that they, and they only, are ultimately responsible for the right upbringing of their children. This responsibility is threefold—to the child, to the State, and to God. And that they may understand the full extent of this responsibility, they must always bear in mind that the child's nature is also threefold, and that each part of its being, physical, intellectual and moral, must receive equal care, must equally be developed and trained by the nutriment, the exercise and the discipline appropriate to each, and that no one part must be stimulated to the detriment of the others. If

* Paper read before Section F. Teachers' Guild.

this could be carried out in its entirety, we should have no athletes with empty brains and want of character, no prodigies of learning with puny bodies and feeble health, no moral fanatics lacking that intellectual balance which alone can render the highest aspirations of service to mankind. Instead, therefore, of concentrating their energies upon the development of certain faculties (however excellent in themselves) to the exclusion of others, parents must keep before them, as the ideal of perfect manhood and womanhood, a body possessing all the beauty, strength and adaptability of which it is capable, a mind equipped with a varied store of knowledge, and provided with powers of observation, reasoning and expression, and both controlled by a character of truth, purity, self-sacrifice and reverence. But a parent may say, We admit the truth of all this, and in order that our children may attain this ideal, we provide the best of nurses, the most highly certificated of teachers, the most expensive of schools. What more can we do? Nay, but, we reply, what is this that you do? You pay much money, and you think that by so doing you divest yourselves of your own responsibility. On the contrary, you increase it. It is doubtless necessary that you should have skilled assistance in the various parts of the work of bringing up your children, but the choice of your assistants rests with yourselves, and without knowledge you cannot judge of their fitness. For mere money payments you cannot buy the necessary qualities; and granted that by this means you do succeed in finding those who are themselves suited for the work, without the intelligent supervision and guidance of the parents, their work lacks harmony and adaptability to the requirements of each individual child. And further, you cannot rid yourselves of that mysterious influence exerted unconsciously by parents on their children, by which one word, one look, one gesture of theirs will often counteract a train of thought that others may have long laboured to instil, or a habit that teachers and nurses may have tried to implant.

Such being then the case, that a responsibility which cannot be devolved upon others rests on parents for the right upbringing of their children, we are led to consider whether parents have taken any means to fit themselves for their duties. You, ladies and gentlemen, have undertaken the task of teaching children, you have devoted your lives—your thought, your energies, your care—to one of the noblest works that man or woman can take

in hand; but before engaging in the service, you have trained yourselves in school, or college, or university, so that you may be equipped at all points for the important posts you are to fill, and you are convinced, and rightly so, that none but those qualified by nature, capacity, personal character, and thorough efficient training, is entitled to be considered, or should be allowed to consider himself, a teacher. In the same way, hospital nurses, lawyers, doctors, clergy, all are required to undergo a period of training, often very long and arduous, before entering upon the work to which they propose to devote their lives. This is as it should be, but parents, whose duties are more difficult, and whose position is one of greater responsibility than that of any of the professions I have named, neither have, nor see any reason why they should have, any training, however perfunctory, to fit them for the duties that devolve upon them.

This leads me to the second part of my subject, the means by which the P.N.E.U. proposes to meet this deficiency. A few parents in any given district who realise the importance of this principle, take counsel together, and, associating themselves with teachers, doctors, and any who can assist in the study of child-nature and training, in friendly and conversational meetings discuss the various problems and difficulties that present themselves, bringing the knowledge and experience of each into the common fund for the benefit of all, and by mutual advice and help stimulating and guiding each other to the more perfect fulfilment of parental duties. These in turn bring others, actual and potential parents, and all, as missionaries, endeavour to spread the principles of true education, in schools, mothers' meetings, amongst their friends, in district-visiting and the like, wherever their influence extends. In the various branches members can learn what books are most useful in their work, and arrangements are made for their loan, so that the library of each may be at the service of all. In fact the variety of agencies is unlimited; press, platform, and pulpit are utilised; and *The Parents' Review*, *The Parents' Review School*, the House of Education, lectures to mothers, to nurses, to servant-girls, are only some of the means which are either actually in operation, or only awaiting adequate means for their realisation. The subjects considered group themselves under the following heads:

I. Food and clothing proper to each age ; hygienic conditions, as light, air, warmth, bathing, &c., and the physiological principles governing them.

(a) Training of the limbs with a view to the attainment of complete symmetry and adaptability to their several functions.

(b) Training of the eye, hand, voice, &c.

(c) Games, gymnastics—their physical advantages and dangers.

(d) The lessons to be derived by parents from the unconscious motions of childhood, its restless activity and the like.

(e) The parents' helps and hindrances in physical training.

II. The connection between physical and mental well-being ; the earliest signs and growth of the perceptive faculties.

(a) Intellectual training, with a view to the complete development of all the mental powers.

(b) Artistic training, graphic and musical.

(c) The educational value of games.

(d) The lessons to be learnt from the instinctive manifestations of the child's mind, its ceaseless questionings, &c.

(e) The parents' helps and hindrances in mental training.

III. The Moral and Spiritual nature, and the influence upon it of physical and mental health.

(a) Moral training for the formation of character.

(b) Religious teaching.

(c) Games and companionship—their moral advantages and dangers.

(d) The lessons to be derived by parents from the trust and love of their children, and the manner in which their children's character and conduct are moulded on their own.

(e) The parents' helps and hindrances in moral and spiritual training.

Our field is thus seen to be a wide one, and in that field we parents claim to be supreme ; to us nurses and teachers, universities, churches and parliaments are subordinate, wherever they touch our children. Our aim is first to awaken parents to a sense of their own duties and their children's rights, and then to ensure under their direction that by right sanitary conditions,

sound teaching, and good laws and customs, these duties shall be fulfilled and these rights safeguarded.

In conclusion, if, in the course of this paper, I have made large claims on behalf of parents, claims from which I dare not abate one jot, in the presence of an audience of teachers I would do so with all humility, acknowledging with gratitude that you have taken a world of trouble to fit yourselves for specialists, while we have been content to blunder on without any preparation. At the same time, I trust I have made it clear that these rights entail the fulfilment of corresponding duties, and, holding as I do that the parent cannot arrogate to himself too much power to help his children, it follows that he must first inform himself as to the right use of it. And it is here that I venture with confidence to invite your assistance. Cannot you devise a curriculum that will prepare the scholars now under your care to become wise parents of the new generation? And cannot you assist us who are now parents in our studies, so that we may rightly understand the nature of our children, the manner in which their various faculties unfold, their development, and the way in which we may promote and guide, or at least not hinder, their growth towards perfection? And thirdly, cannot you, in concert with parents, so reform that part of the training of children that falls more immediately under your care, so that it may not "lean," to quote Mr. Gladstone's words, "if ever so little, to that theory of education which would have it to construct machines of so many horse-power, rather than to form character, to rear into excellence that marvellous creature we call man ; which gloats upon success in life, instead of studying to secure that the man shall always be greater than his work, and never bounded by it, but that his eye shall always boldly run, in the words of Wordsworth :

" 'Along the line of limitless desires.' "

Before the child comes under your care, the lines of his character, physical, intellectual and moral, are marked out, and the foundation of his education so firmly laid, that you can only complete, at most with certain modifications, the work that has been begun. Help us then so to mark out these lines aright, so truly to lay these foundations, that you may have no occasion to rebuild, or to waste precious time in laboriously rectifying faulty work, but may, with ever-increasing delight, carry the structure higher and yet higher towards the ideal that we have set before us.